

Junhā Sutta

The Discourse on the Moonlit Night

Also **Yakkha, pahāra Sutta** = The Discourse on the Yaksha's Blow¹

[Sāriputta deep in samadhi is unharmed by a yaksha's attack]

(Udāna 4.4/39-41)

Translated & annotated by Piya Tan ©2008

Introduction

The Junhā Sutta (U 4.4) is a very short account about Sāriputta and Moggallāna, with at least two important themes. The first is that of *the power of samadhi*,² and the second is *spiritual friendship*.³ That a flying yaksha attacks Sāriputta but fails to hurt him in any way, is purely incidental, even a mythical tale,⁴ if you like, especially to whet the interest of those who are unfamiliar with the wonders of deep meditation.⁵

How is it that Sāriputta is effectively unhurt except that his head “hurts a bit” [§5]. The Sutta itself does not say what kind of meditation or concentration Sāriputta has done, The Udāna Commentary, however, explains that the sort of concentration that Sāriputta has experienced here is one of these:

- (1) the divine abode (*brahma, vihāra*) of equanimity (that is, the fourth dhyana);
- (2) the attainment of cessation of feeling and perception (*nirodha, samāpatti*);⁶ or
- (3) the attainment of fruition (*phala, samāpatti*).⁷

Only these three kinds of concentration are capable of protecting the body. (UA 245)

In layperson's terms, it could be explained that when we are deep in dhyanic bliss, all mental hindrances (sense-desires, ill will, sloth-and-torpor, restlessness-and-remorse, and doubt) are overcome so that the mind is fully focussed in the present moment. In due course, the mind is so focussed that it overcomes any perception of time and space, and then even lets go of consciousness itself. At this stage, the body is nothing but the four elements (earth, water, fire and wind), which as such are indestructible.

Sāriputta's encounter with the yaksha is quoted by Buddhaghosa, in his **Visuddhi, magga**, as an example of “success by intervention of concentration” (*samādhi, vipphāra iddhi*), and he mentions other such cases:

¹ Be, We 18Ud:288. (We = World Tipitaka): <http://tipitakastudies.net/node/266835#>.

² On *samadhi*, see *Bhāvanā* = SD 15.1 (9.4).

³ On *spiritual friendship*, see SD 8.1 & SD 34.

⁴ On the nature of *myths*, see SD 36, esp SD 36.1.

⁵ On dhyana and meditation, see *Dhyana* = SD 84.4; *Bhāvanā* = SD 15.1 esp §8; see also **Meditation and Consciousness** = SD 17.8c (7.4).

⁶ “The cessation of perception and feeling,” *saññā, vedayita nirodha*, ie, the attainment of cessation (*nirodha, samāpatti*, S 14.11/2:151). The absolute necessary preconditions to this attainment are said to be the perfect mastery of all the 8 dhyanas as well as the previous attainment of non-return or arhathood. Comys say that this state may last for 7 days or even longer (MA 1:125, 152; AA 1:152; DhA 1:109; BA 163). Immediately at the arising of the state, however, there arises in the non-returner, the fruition of non-return (*anāgāmi, phala*), and in the arhat, the fruition of arhathood (*arahatta, phala*) (PmA 1:41, 321). Only an arhat or a non-returner can experience this cessation (A 5.166/3:193 f; Vism 23.18/702, 23.49/708). On emerging from cessation, they experience the fruit of their respective attainment (Vism 708). See **Ariya, pariyesanā S** (M 26.42/1:175) = SD 1.11 & Intro 4.1 & **Sappurisa S** (M 113) = SD 23.7 Intro (2). See also Brahmavamso, *Mindfulness, Bliss and Beyond*, 2006: 217 f.

⁷ *Phala* means “fruition, result,” which denotes, according to Abhidhamma, those moments of supramundane consciousness which flash forth immediately after the moment of path-consciousness (the moment of attaining sainthood), and which, until the attainment of the next higher path, may with the practice of insight, recur countless times. In such a situation, it is called “fruition attainment” (*phala, samāpatti*) (sv BDict): see Vism 23.6-15/699-702.

A distinction that arises by virtue of calmness (*samath'ānubhāvena*), before, after or at the moment of concentration, is called “success by intervention of concentration” (*samādhi, vipphāra iddhi*). For, it is said,

“The goal of the abandoning the hindrances is won through (the attainment of) the first dhyana, thus it is success by intervention of concentration...

The goal of the abandoning of the base of nothingness is won through the attainment of the base of neither perception nor non-perception, thus it is success by intervention of concentration.

There was success by intervention of concentration in the venerable Sāriputta,... [U 4.4]

...in the venerable Sañjīva,... [M 1:333]

...in the venerable Khāṇu Koṇḍañña,... [DhA 2:254]

...in the lay disciple Uttarā,... [DhA 3.310; AA 1:451]

...in the lay disciple Sāmāvati.... [DhA 1:216; AA 1:443].” (Pm 22.26/2:211 f)⁸

(Vism 12.30/380)

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The Discourse on the Moonlit Night

(U 4.4/39-41)

Thus have I heard.

The two yakshas

1 At one time, the Blessed One was residing in the squirrels’ feeding-ground in the Bamboo Grove [Velu,vana] near Rāja,gaha.

Now at that time, the venerable Sāriputta and the venerable Moggallāna were residing in Pigeon Gully [Kapota,kandarā].

Now at that time, the venerable Sāriputta, with his head newly shaven, was seated in the open, at night, in the moonlight, having attained a certain samadhi.⁹

2 Now at that time, two yakshas who were companions were going from the north to a southern quarter on a certain business.

The yakshas saw the venerable Sāriputta, with his head newly shaven, seated in the open, at night, in the moonlight.

Upon seeing him, the first yaksha said this to the second yaksha, “It occurs to me, my friend, to give a blow on this recluse’s head!”

When this was said, the second yaksha said this to the first:

“No, sir! Don’t strike [Don’t attack] the recluse! A mighty recluse, my friend, is he, of great power, of great majesty!”

3 For a second time, the yaksha said this to the other yaksha,

“It occurs to me, my friend, [40] to give a blow on this recluse’s head!”

For the second time, the second yaksha said this to the first:

“No, sir! Don’t strike [Don’t attack] the recluse!¹⁰ A mighty recluse, my friend, is he, of great power, of great potency!”

⁸ Also qu at PmA 3:669.

⁹ *Aññatarāṃ samādhiṃ samāpajjivā*, ie, “when he had yet to emerge from that attainment” (UA246). Comy adds that this concentration is one of these: (1) the divine abode (*brahma, vihāra*) of equanimity; (2) some teachers say the attainment of cessation of feeling and perception (*nirodha, samāpatti*), and (3) others say the attainment of fruition (*phala, samāpatti*); for, only these three are capable of protecting the body (UA 245).

4 Then, that yaksha, disregarding the other yaksha, gave a blow to the head of the venerable elder Sāriputta. It was a great blow.¹¹ With that blow, a bull elephant¹² of seven cubits¹³ [2.85 m] or of seven cubits and a half [3 m] would be felled,¹⁴ or a mountain peak¹⁵ would be split!¹⁶

And then the yaksha fell¹⁷ right there into the great hell [Mahā Niraya], uttering, “I’m burning! I’m burning!”

Saiputta’s response

5 Now, the venerable Mahā Moggallāna, with his divine eye, purified and surpassing that of the human, saw the blow being given by the yaksha to the venerable Sāriputta’s head. Seeing that, he approached the venerable Sāriputta and said this to him:

“How are you, avuso, I hope you’re bearing up! I hope you’re all right! I hope there is no pain at all!”¹⁸

“Avuso Moggallāna, I’m bearing up. Avuso Moggallāna, I’m all right. But my head hurts a bit!”

6 “It’s marvellous, avuso Sāriputta! It’s wonderful, avuso Sāriputta! What great power the venerable Sāriputta has, how greatly potent!

Just now, avuso Sāriputta, a certain yaksha dealt a blow to your head. It was a great blow. With that blow, an elephant of seven cubits or of seven cubits and a half would be felled, or a mountain peak would be split! But the venerable Sāriputta merely says:

“Avuso Moggallāna, I’m bearing up. Avuso Moggallāna, I’m all right. But my head hurts a bit!”

7 “It’s marvellous, avuso Moggallāna! It’s wonderful, avuso Moggallāna! What great power the venerable Moggallāna has, how greatly potent! I mean, he sees even a yaksha, but I do not now see even a dust spirit!”¹⁹

¹⁰ *Mā samaṇaṃ āsādesi*. Here *āsādeti* has a literal sense of “attack” or “strike”; but it also has a figurative sense (“attack, offend”): see **Nandaka Tha**: “Think not of bodies (*pura*), | do not offend [attack] the Tathagatas! (*māsādesi tathāgate*) || they delight not in the heavens | what more of human existence!” (Tha 280). The yaksha “punched” (*muṭṭhi, ghātaṃ akāsi*) at Sāriputta’s head (UA 245).

¹¹ *Tāva mahā pahāro ahoṣi* (Be Ce Se We), PTS omits. See U:M 82 n56: cf U 40,21. Cf S 2:217.

¹² *Nāga*. Here used in a literal sense, referring to “bull elephant,” but below it is used in a figurative sense of “heroic saint” [§8]. This simile also appears in **Uppasaya S** (S 16.10/2:217), where its Comy glosses “seven cubits” (*satta, ratana*) as “the measure of seven hands” (*satta, hattha-p, pamāṇa*) (SA 2:176). A “cubit” (*ratana*) or “hand” (*hattha*) is the length from the elbow to the finger-tip. See U:M 82 n57. See also foll n.

¹³ A cubit (*ratana*) here, according to Comy, that of a medium-sized man (UA 245), ie, twice the distance between the tips of the thumb and of the index finger with the fingers outstretched (VbhA 343), which would be about 16 ins or 41 cm. As such, 7 cubits would be about 9 ft 2 ins or 2.85 m. The elephant mentioned here would be about 9-10 ft tall. For a similar imagery, see (**Durabhisambhava**) **Upāli S** (A 10.99.3a/203) = SD 30.9. See **UA:M 608 f, esp 692-694 (n491)** on such ancient measurements. See prec n.

¹⁴ “Would be felled” (*osādeyya*), from *osādeti* (caus of *osīdati*), to cause to sink, to depress (DPL). See UA 246.

¹⁵ “A huge mountain peak the size of Mt Kailash (*kelāsa, kūṭa*)” (UA 246; cf UA 300).

¹⁶ Buddhaghosa, quoting Sāriputta’s experience as an example of “success through samadhi intervention” (*samādhī, vipphāra iddhi*) does not mention these two similes, but instead says “the sound of which is like that of a thunder-clap in the clouds” (*yassa meghassa viya gajjato saddo ahoṣi*) (Vism 12.31/380). See Intro.

¹⁷ *Apatāsi*. Comy glosses *apatāsi* (Be Ee We) (Se *avatthāsi*; Ce *avatthāsi*) = *apati* (alt gram form): “evidently... as an alternative aorist form of *patati* [he falls]” (U:M 82 n59). Comy: “But why did he go to hell in his very state of yakshahood? He did not. For, here, because of the bad karma that fruit here and now, he felt great pain in that very state of yakshahood by its power. But on account of the karma with immediate result experienced on rebirth, he fell into hell immediately upon falling (from the yaksha state) (*kiṃ pana so yakkhatta, bhāven’eva nirayaṃ upagacchī ti? Na upagacchi, yañ h’etha dīṭṭha, dhamma, vedanīyaṃ pāpa, kammaṃ ahoṣi, tassa balena yakkhatta, bhāve mahantaṃ dukkhaṃ anubhavi. Yaṃ pana upapajja, vedanīyaṃ ānantariya, kammaṃ, tena cuti, anantaram niraye uppajjī ti*, UA 246). On the types of karma mentioned, see Vism 19.14/601.

¹⁸ *Kacci te āvuso khamanīyaṃ kacci vāpanīyaṃ kacci na kiñci dukkhaṃ ti*, lit “Avuso, perhaps you are bearing it, perhaps you can keep going; perhaps there is no pain whatsoever!” This is stock. The underscored phrase lit tr “perhaps you are fit to keep going.” I have rendered this as “How are you?” and place it at the head of the sentence for the sake of idiomatic English. For a longer, but sad example, see **Chann’ovāda S** (M 144.4/3:264) = SD 11.12.

8 And the Blessed One, through his divine ear-element,²⁰ purified and surpassing that of the human, heard this whole conversation of the two great nagas [great dragons].²¹

9 Then, the Blessed One, understanding the significance of the occasion, uttered this udana [inspired utterance]: [41]

<p>10 <i>Yassa</i>²²<i>selūpamaṃ cittaṃ </i> <i>ṭhitaṃ nānupakampati </i> <i>virattaṃ rajanīyesu </i> <i>kopaneyye na kuppati </i> <i>yass'evaṃ bhāvitāṃ cittaṃ </i> <i>kuto taṃ dukkhaṃ essatī ti </i></p>	<p>For one who mind is like a rock, stable and unshaking, undyed by things that delight, unangered by what provokes anger— for such a cultivated mind [cultured heart], whence can suffering come to him? (Also at Tha 191)²³</p>
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¹⁹ “Dust spirit” (*paṃsu, pisācaka*), ie, a small preta that haunts the top of refuse heap, etc (*saṅkāra, kūt'ādisu*) (UA 247). Comy adds that Sāriputta, who did not wish his attainment to be known (*adhigāṃ' appicchānaṃ*), said this in reference to his not seeing them, because at that time, he had not adverted to them: hence, he said “now” (*eta-rahī*) (UA 247).

²⁰ “Divine ear element” (*dibba, sota, dhātu*), ie clairaudience: see **Miracles** = SD 27.5a (5.2).

²¹ *Nāga*, here used in a fig sense, meaning “heroic saint” (M 1:151, 386; S 2:277, 3:83; Dh 320; Sn 29, 53, 166, 421, 518; U 4.4.8/40); of the Buddha (Sn 522, 845, 1058, 1101; Miln 346).

²² Tha 191 has “whose” (*kassa*).

²³ Quoted as “pertaining to the adept” (*asekha, bhāgiya*) at Nett 149.